Is political reality accurately portrayed in motion pictures? Do cinematic practices and imperatives give rise to a “reel-world” view of politics? This course explores these questions through a survey of films, readings, and lectures on movies that deal with politics. Specifically we will examine the topics of racial politics, presidential power, and the interplay between mass media and politics. Students should expect to develop a more in-depth understanding of the issues covered as well as a better appreciation of the cultural significance of the way that politics and political issues are portrayed in the movies. Students are required to view full-length, feature-films ranging from classics such as *Gone With The Wind* (1939) and *All the President's Men* (1976) to more recent pictures such like *W* (2009) and *The Help* (2011).

Tuesdays 6-8:40pm DU 459

Instructor: Artemus Ward  
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Office Hours: T 11am-noon, 1pm-2pm, 5pm-6pm. I am usually in my office all day, every day. Feel free to stop by anytime.
Required Readings:

- On-line readings listed after each week’s films. Note: some of the readings are from journals accessible through JSTOR when using an on-campus computer or logging into the network from off-campus.

Suggested Texts:


Film Sites:

- [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) - streaming television and film clips as well as full-length movies.
- [hulu.com](http://hulu.com) – streaming television and film clips as well as full-length movies.
- [watch-movies.net](http://watch-movies.net) – links to streaming on-line films.
- [btjunkie.org](http://btjunkie.org) – bittorrent search engine for downloadable files.
- [netflix.com](http://netflix.com) - watch streaming movies instantly or have them delivered to your mailbox.
- [blockbuster.com](http://blockbuster.com) – rent movies and have them delivered to your mailbox.
Web Resources:

- The Best Films of All Time – A Primer of Cinematic History, filmiste.org
- The Internet Movie Database (IMDb).
- Film Quarterly – Academic film journal since 1958 for film scholars and film buffs.
- Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media - online film journal archive, 1974-present.
- The Film Journal: Dedicated to Serious Film Writing.
- Senses of Cinema – An online film journal to serious and eclectic discussion of cinema.
- Images: A Journal of Film and Popular Culture.
- The Moving Arts Film Journal.

Film List Chronology:

- The Birth of a Nation (1915). Did the Civil War lead to anarchy in a black-ruled south during Reconstruction? Directed by D.W. Griffith. Starring Lillian Gish. 187 minutes.

- Gone With The Wind (1939). The greatest film of all time? Directed by Victor Fleming (Academy Award Winner—Best Director, Best Picture). Starring Clark Gable (Academy Award Nomination—Best Actor), Viven Leigh (Academy Award Winner—Best Actress), Leslie Howard, Olive de Havilland (Academy Award Nomination—Best Supporting Actress), and Hattie McDaniel (Academy Award Winner—Best Supporting Actress). 238 minutes.

- The Song of the South (1946). The banned film that inspired Splash Mountain at Disneyland. Directed by Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson. Starring James Baskett (Academy Award—Honorary Award following his death in 1948) and Hattie McDaniel.

- All the President’s Men (1976). In the run-up to the 1972 elections, new Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward covers what seems to be a minor break-in at the Democratic Party national headquarters. He is surprised to find top lawyers at the arraignment and even more puzzled by an entry in the address book of one of the burglars: “Howard Hunt @ W House.” Trying to make sense of it all back at the newsroom Woodward asks “Can you call the White House direct?” Directed by Alan J. Pakula (Academy Award Nominations—Best Director; Best Picture). Starring Robert Redford, Dustin Hoffman, Jason Robards (Academy Award Winner—Best Supporting Actor), and Jane Alexander (Academy Award Nomination—Best Supporting Actress). 138 minutes.


Award Nomination—Best Actress), Albert Brooks (Academy Award Nomination—Best Supporting Actor), Jack Nicholson, and Joan Cusack. 133 minutes.


- **Thirteen Days** (2000). Kevin Costner gets to be a Kennedy brother, sort of. Directed by Roger Donaldson. Starring Kevin Costner and Bruce Greenwood. 145 minutes.

- **Shattered Glass** (2003). Is there a place for fiction at the intersection of journalism and politics? Directed by Billy Ray. Starring Hayden Christensen, Peter Sarsgaard, Chloe Sevigny, and Hank Azaria. 95 minutes.


- **The Help** (2011). So you wanna be a writer… Directed by Tate Taylor. Starring Emma Stone, Viola Davis, Bryce Dallas Howard, Octavia Spencer, and Jessica Chastain. 146 minutes.

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**Course Requirements:**

**Paper**

You are required to write a 5-6 page term paper which is due at the end of the course on the date specified on the course calendar. In this paper I expect you to go beyond the course material. You can either examine themes in required films and then add to that by screening similar films on your own, or you can choose a theme that we do not cover in the course but that relates to the course topic: politics and film. The paper must include an appropriate discussion of:

1. At least four films that are relevant to your topic. These films can be ones we view in class and/or films you view on your own. They must be discussed and cited in your essay and also listed in a bibliography at the end of your paper.

2. At least four different sources such as books or articles that relate to the films you are discussing. These sources can be on-line and can be sources linked from the syllabus and/or sources you locate on your own. They must be discussed and cited in your essay and also listed in your bibliography. While you may use any book or article, in order to earn an “A” on the paper all four sources must be scholarly books from university presses or articles in academic journals. Toward this end I strongly recommend using JSTOR or another scholarly database to find articles in film studies, communications, and other related areas. Papers that rely on popular sources such as newspaper articles
and film reviews can only earn a “B” at best. Papers that rely on general film webpages such as Wikipedia or IMDB can only earn a “C” at best. Note: course lectures do NOT count as a source toward this requirement.

**Scholarly sources** combine discussion of individual films, genres and directors with in-depth considerations of the medium and the conditions of its production and reception. Scholarly books and articles contrast with film reviewing in newspapers, magazines, and on-line which principally serve as a consumer guide to movies. If you are unsure of whether a source counts as a scholarly source, please consult the course instructor. Here is a list of scholarly film journals: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_film_periodicals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_film_periodicals)

Some possible topics: the portrayal of African-Americans in film; gender discrimination in film; the presidency in film; American foreign policy in film; Civil War films; WWI films; WWII films; Cold War films; Vietnam War films; American Wars in the Middle-East; War on Terror films; congress in film; the fourth branch: the intersection of journalism and politics; Watergate’s portrayal in film; Hollywood’s portrayal of Richard Nixon; women reporters in a male-dominated profession; CIA in film; political assassinations; running for office: campaigns and elections. For other ideas explore the suggested readings and on-line resources.

As with all papers, the paper for this class must be type-written or word-processed, double-spaced, with normal fonts (usually 12 pt.) and margins (at most one inch all around) and no fancy folders (a solid staple in the corner will do just fine). Make sure that you properly attribute and cite whenever you use information from a source such as a book, article, webpage, or film. You may use any accepted citation format such a within-text-cites, footnotes, or endnotes and any accepted bibliographic style. Consult a resource such as the Chicago Style manual or similar work if you are unsure of proper citation/bibliographic formats. This is particularly crucial for internet sources. Also, films should be cited in the bibliography by title and year.

Before you start writing this or any essay, ask yourself: What is my overall argument/thesis? Am I supporting my position with reasons and/or evidence? Am I structuring my discussion so that it is as clear and comprehensive as it can be? Have I provided examples and explanations for each argument that I advance? What are the possible counter-arguments that my critics might bring up and how would I respond to those criticisms?

In grading your essays I will consider whether you have (a) developed a clear and thoughtful thesis, (b) supported your thesis with a well-reasoned and well-organized discussion, (c) taken into account opposing points of view, (d) demonstrated your familiarity with course materials, and (e) followed the paper requirements including length, sources, and the rules of proper grammar, spelling, and citation/bibliographic format. Note: JSTOR is not a source and should not be cited in your bibliography. It is a **highly recommended** search engine which allows you to locate specific sources.
Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will be an objective test consisting of multiple choice and true/false questions about the required lectures, films, and readings that you are responsible for up to that point in the course. There will be 50 questions (worth 2 points each) and you will have 30 minutes maximum to complete the exam once you start. It will be available through Blackboard for a 24-hour period on the day listed on the course calendar (below). Make sure you use a reliable computer to take the test. The exam cannot be made up under any circumstances.

Final Exam

The final exam will be the same format as the midterm: an objective test consisting of multiple choice and true/false questions about the lectures, films, and readings. However, the final will only cover course material assigned AFTER the midterm exam. There will be 50 questions (worth 2 points each) and you will have 30 minutes maximum to complete the exam once you start. It will be available through Blackboard for a 24-hour period on the day listed on the course calendar (below). Make sure you use a reliable computer to take the test. The final cannot be made up under any circumstances.

Grading System:

Final grades will be determined by the following scale:

- 90-100 = A
- 80-89 = B
- 70-79 = C
- 60-69 = D
- 0-59 = F

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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Course Policies:

1. Extracurricular Activities - It is your responsibility to notify me in advance of any activities that will disrupt your participation in the class. If your activities make it impossible for you to keep up with the course material you should consider withdrawing from the course.

2. Late Work - Anything turned in late will be marked down one-third grade for every day it is overdue. Exceptions are made only in the most extraordinary circumstances and I will require some sort of documentation to make any accommodation.

3. Cheating and Plagiarism - Students cheating and plagiarizing will fail the assignment on which they have committed the infraction and will be referred to the appropriate judicial board for disciplinary action. The submission of any work by a student is taken as guarantee that the thoughts and expressions in it are the student's own except when properly credited to another. Violations of this principle include giving or receiving aid in an exam or where otherwise prohibited, fraud, plagiarism, or any other deceptive act in connection with academic work. Plagiarism is the representation of another's words, ideas, opinions, or other products of work as one's own, either overtly or by failing to attribute them to their true source.

4. Undergraduate Writing Awards - The Department of Political Science will recognize, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Winners are expected to attend the Department's spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and $50.00. Papers, which can be submitted by students or faculty, must be supplied in triplicate to a department secretary by the end of February. All copies should have two cover pages - one with the student's name and one without the student's name. Only papers written in the previous calendar can be considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year's competition even if the student has graduated.

5. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities - A student who believes that reasonable accommodations with respect to course work or other academic requirements may be appropriate in consideration of a disability must (1) provide the required verification of the disability to the Center for Access-Ability Resources, (2) meet with the Center for Access-Ability Resources to determine appropriate accommodations, and (3) inform the faculty in charge of the academic activity of the need for accommodation. Students are encouraged to inform the faculty of their requests for accommodations as early as possible in the semester, but must make the requests in a timely enough manner for accommodations to be appropriately considered and reviewed by the university. If contacted by the faculty member, the staff of the Center for Access-Ability Resources will provide advice about accommodations that may be indicated in the particular case. Students who make requests for reasonable accommodations are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the Center for Access-Ability Resources in this process, including but not limited to the Student Handbook. A wide range of services can be obtained by students with disabilities, including housing, transportation, adaptation of printed materials, and advocacy with faculty and staff. Students with disabilities who need such services or want more information should contact the Center for Access-Ability Resources at 815-753-1303.
6. Department of Political Science Web Site - Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to http://polisci.niu.edu.

Course Calendar:

I suggest that you watch the film before accessing course materials on it. You should also take notes while viewing. Many of these films are highly complex and, as you will be discussing some of them in your final paper, you will want to refer to specific characters, scenes, and even dialogue. If you are like me and prefer to watch films without knowing anything about what you are about to see, then I recommend doing the assigned readings and accessing lecture material AFTER you watch each film. You may find that after viewing the film once and then accessing the course materials, you may want to watch the picture again and again… I have seen most of these pictures dozens of times and have memorized much of the dialogue. If you are not careful, you may end up in the same, sad shape… films are addicting! Caveat emptor!

Week 1: T 1/17: Course Introduction

Racial Politics


Required Reading:

Suggested Reading:


Required Reading:
- Collett, Janelle, “Romanticizing the Old South: A Feminist, Historical Analysis of *Gone With the Wind*,” feminist.com

Suggested Reading:


Required Reading:

Suggested Reading:

Required Reading:

Suggested Reading:


Required Reading:

Suggested Films: Ten Picaninnies (1904); How Rastus Got His Pork Chop (1908); The Nigger (1915); The Realization of a Negro’s Ambition (1916); Hallelujah (1929); Hearts in Dixie (1929); King Kong (1933); Harlem Rides the Range (1939); Native Land (1942); Cabin in the Sky (1943); Tall, Tan, and Terrific (1946); The Foxxes of Harrow (1947); Home of the Brave (1949); Intruder in the Dust (1949); Pinky (1949); The Defiant Ones (1958); Imitation of Life (1959); To Kill a Mockingbird (1962); Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner (1967); In the Heat of the Night (1967); Planet of the Apes (1968); Slaves (1969); Beneath the Planet of the Apes (1970); Escape from the Planet of the Apes (1971); Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song (1971); Shaft (1971); Shaft’s Big Score (1972); Conquest of the Planet of the Apes (1972); Superfly (1972); Battle for the Planet of the Apes (1973); Coffy (1973); Shaft in Africa (1973); Foxy Brown (1974); Mandingo (1975); Ragtime (1981); 48 Hours (1982); The Toy (1982); Beverly Hills Cop (1984); Brother from Another Planet (1984); Def Con 4 (1985); The Color Purple (1985); Enemy Mine (1985); She’s Gotta Have It (1986); Matewan (1987); Betrayed (1988); Lethal Weapon (1988); Mississippi Burning (1988); Do the Right Thing (1989); Driving Miss Daisy (1989); Glory (1989); Boyz N the Hood (1991); New Jack City (1991); Malcolm X (1992); Menace II Society (1992); Sankofa (1993); Pulp Fiction (1994); Dead Presidents (1995); Amistad (1997); Jackie Brown (1997); Soul Food (1997); Beloved (1998); Enemy of the State (1998); Bait (2000); Bamboozled (2000); Shaft (2000); Barbershop (2002); Baadassssss! (2003); Bringing Down the House (2003); Head of State (2003); The Human Stain (2003); The Manchurian Candidate (2004); King Kong (2005); Precious (2009); The Blind Side (2010).

The mid-term exam will be available on Blackboard for a 24-hour period beginning at the end of class on T 3/6.
Week 9: Spring Break

Politics & Journalism

“There is no such thing as Objective Journalism, the phrase itself is a pompous contradiction in terms.”

-- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*

Week 10 T 3/20: *All the President’s Men* (1976).

Required Reading:

Suggested Reading:


Required Reading:

Suggested Reading:

Required Reading:

Suggested Reading:


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**The Presidency**

“Remember, always give your best. Never get discouraged. Never be petty. Always remember, others may hate you. But those who hate you don’t win, unless you hate them and then, you destroy yourself.”

-- President Richard Nixon, Resignation Speech, August 9, 1974


Required Reading:


Required Reading:

Suggested Reading:


**Final term papers are due today. Hand in at the start of class.**

Required Reading:
Suggested Films: JFK (1991); Dave (1993); The American President (1995); Absolute Power (1997); Primary Colors (1998); Thirteen Days (2000); Pearl Harbor (2001); Frost-Nixon (2008); An American Affair (2009); The Kennedys (2011)

Suggested Readings:
- Smith, Jeff. The Presidents We Imagine: Two Centuries of White House Fiction on the Page, on the Screen, Onscreen and Online (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

Week 17 The final exam will be available on Blackboard for a 24-hour period beginning on Tuesday, May 8th at 6pm.